

Message

From: Poy, Thomas [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=6D30804725BE4468B610F9863E2C938E-TPOY02]
Sent: 8/13/2015 6:10:55 PM
To: Tinka Hyde - EPA [Hyde.Tinka@epa.gov]; Timothy Henry - EPA [Henry.Timothy@epa.gov]; Maraldo, Dean [Maraldo.Dean@epa.gov]; Davenport, Thomas [davenport.thomas@epa.gov]
Subject: FW: Milwaukee Journal article

FYI...Comments from Russ on manure spreading, esp. in karst areas.

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From: Marquardt, Steve
Sent: Thursday, August 13, 2015 12:58 PM
To: Poy, Thomas; Bielanski, Andrew
Subject: Milwaukee Journal article

A Department of Natural Resources official acknowledged Wednesday that the system of spreading manure in certain regions of Wisconsin isn't adequately protecting drinking water supplies and said the state will recommend new application methods in coming months.

"There is a definite need for targeted standards," Russ Rasmussen, the DNR's top water regulator, told the Natural Resources Board at a meeting in Horicon.

The agency for now isn't suggesting new regulations, which would mandate limits on how much manure could be applied on land where animal waste and other pollutants are polluting groundwater supplies, Rasmussen said.

Instead, he said, his agency, the state agriculture department and other groups are developing voluntary recommendations — known as best management practices — for applying manure on karst topography, especially in northeast Wisconsin, where water and manure are known to flow quickly through fractured bedrock and potentially taint the groundwater.

His comments highlight growing concerns with polluted wells in areas where there are heavy livestock populations.

Rasmussen said the focus for now is primarily on places like karst-rich Kewaunee County, where a burgeoning livestock population has also engendered vocal opposition to large-scale dairy farming. But he said the recommended practices would eventually be tailored to areas of central Wisconsin, where sandy soils drain into the groundwater.

The voluntary recommendations would be developed with other state technical experts and input from environmentalists and farmers.

Much of the regulation of manure is voluntary. Large-scale dairy farmers are required to follow plans that guide how much fertilizer and manure can be applied to soil.

But those practices are now aimed at avoiding surface runoff into streams, rivers and lakes. Surface runoff creates a different set of problems by adding phosphorus and nitrogen that waterways sometimes can't handle. The result: algae-clogged lakes. In the Green Bay watershed, nonpoint pollution from farms and cities has been responsible for a "dead zone," bereft of oxygen and inhospitable to aquatic life.

At Wednesday's meeting, board member and dairy farmer Bill Bruins said the "dairy industry in Wisconsin is changing rapidly and is creating new circumstances and new challenges. I think we ought to acknowledge that."

The new practices would be designed to keep manure from entering aquifers.

Will it work?

Rasmussen said it's premature and he did not rule out regulations at some point in the future.

"Right now, we are not in a position to push out any more regulations," he said.

The DNR under the administration of GOP Gov. Scott Walker has rarely, if ever, pushed stricter environmental rules to address pollution issues.

But the DNR is under pressure to do something.

In October, six environmental groups asked the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to investigate groundwater contamination in Kewaunee County after repeated reports of tainted wells near farms.

In 2013, 149 wells, or nearly 31% of the 483 wells tested in the county, contained bacteria or nitrates — or both — that exceeded state and federal public health standards.

In the Town of Lincoln, half the wells that were tested exceeded the standard, according to the petition to the EPA from the environmental organizations.

The well testing was conducted by the Kewaunee County conservation department and was analyzed by the Center for Watershed Science and Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Rasmussen said the EPA turned the matter back to the DNR and directed the agency to address the problem. The group working on best management practices is one effort. Another is looking for ways to help families with the immediate issue of polluted wells.

Dairy farmer John Pagel is a member of the work group devising new manure spreading strategies. His farm, Pagel's Ponderosa Dairy, milks 5,000 cows in Kewaunee County.

Pagel said the county clearly has problems with polluted wells, especially in Lincoln and Red River townships. But he said the latest round of results showed that 22% of wells tested were tainted with bacteria or nitrates. He said that is more in line with rural wells across the state.

Pagel is chairman of the land water conservation committee in the county. He said farmers will welcome the new recommendations.

"I have seen little resistance and a lot of acceptance," Pagel said.

As for dealing with environmental groups and local opposition, "that's an ongoing effort," he said.

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